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Senior Health and Wellness Newsletter

Kentucky Department for Aging and Independent Living

Preventive Oral Health Series: Part II : Choosing the Right Toothpaste

In the first article of our Series on Preventive Oral Health, we reviewed how to brush your teeth most effectively and how to select the correct type of toothbrush as two keys to good oral care. This article will review what you can do to effectively choose the right toothpaste for good oral hygiene and to help prevent periodontal (gum) disease.

Brushing your teeth at least two times a day (morning and night) along with flossing at least once a day to clean between the teeth, are cornerstones of good oral healthcare and keys in the prevention of periodontal disease. Periodontal disease is very common in adults and is a contributing factor leading to an increased risk and development of poor diabetes control, aspiration pneumonia, stroke and other conditions.

Toothpaste Definition and Ingredients

Although the components of a particular toothpaste may vary, there are ingredients which are found in most toothpastes. Some of those common ingredients are: abrasive agents, water, binders-thickeners, moisturizers, detergents, flavoring & sweetening agents, and preservatives. In addition there may be various therapeutic agents like Fluoride.

Toothpaste Regulation

The United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approves all toothpastes which have Fluoride and requires that the manufacturer meet certain standards or requirements for the product's active ingredients, indications for use, and claims. However, the FDA does not test toothpastes to insure or verify the product is in compliance.

According to The American Dental Association (ADA), the "ADA Seal of Acceptance" is designed to help consumers make informed decisions about safe and effective consumer products (e.g.s toothpaste). The ADA Seal Program is voluntary for



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manufacturers. To qualify for the Seal, a company must meet a number of requirements to prove ingredients and manufacturing processes are safe and effective.

Toothpaste Selection

Selecting the proper toothpaste to meet your needs is very important. This is not a one size fits all situation, as there are many types of toothpastes on the market today.

The first step in selecting a toothpaste is to select one that contains Fluoride. Fluoride works primarily and most effectively to inhibit tooth demineralization, enhance tooth remineralization and inhibit plaque bacteria. All toothpastes which have earned the ADA Seal of Acceptance contain Fluoride. Research suggests brushing with a fluoridated toothpaste results in a significant (21%-45%) reduction in cavities depending on brushing frequency (1-3 times per day). This reduction in cavities is in addition to the reduction already achieved by drinking fluoridated water (approximately 50%). Therefore, using a Fluoridated Toothpaste and drinking fluoridated water are both important in achieving good cavity reduction results.

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Types of Toothpaste

Toothpastes for Sensitive Teeth (Hypersensitivity):

These toothpastes have special ingredients such as potassium nitrate, strontium chloride or high levels of stannous fluoride to decrease tooth sensitivity. These toothpastes can be particularly helpful for people with exposed root surfaces. It may take several days or weeks to notice a change in tooth sensitivity after starting to use a toothpaste formulated for hypersensitivity.

Gingivitis or Plaque Control Toothpastes:

Plaque is bacteria that adheres to tooth surfaces. These toothpastes have additives which typically inhibit bacteria responsible for the progression of gingivitis and plaque formation.

Calculus or Tartar Control Toothpastes:

Calculus or tartar is mineralized plaque which hardens and becomes difficult to remove. These toothpastes have additives which help prevent the formation and build-up of calculus or tartar.

Whitening Toothpaste:

It should be understood that Whitening Toothpaste is not a substitute for in-office or take-home whitening treatments or products. Although some of these products may contain peroxide which is found in some whitening agents, the mechanism of action for these toothpastes is through additives which help in the efficient removal of extrinsic (not in the tooth structure) stains.

High Fluoride Toothpaste:

Most over-the-counter (OTC) toothpastes contain similar concentrations of Fluoride that prove beneficial for most people when used in conjunction with good oral hygiene, regular cleaning and check-ups by a Dentist and Dental Hygienist. However, for people with conditions such as exposed root surfaces and a high susceptibility to cavities, toothpastes are available by prescription from a Dentist which contain a higher level of Fluoride than OTC brands.

People should visit a Dentist regularly for an oral examination (check-up) and cleaning. Every six months is a common schedule; however, depending on a person's particular oral health status and needs, it may be more or less than every six months. The check-up is an excellent time to review brushing technique with your Dentist or Dental Hygienist and to discuss what type of toothpaste is best suited to meet your oral health needs. **Note: It is very important to use a toothpaste that is not too abrasive as it can cause damage to teeth and gums.**

Remember: Selecting the right toothpaste and using a good toothbrushing technique with the correct type of toothbrush are essential parts of good oral care.

For more information on tooth brushing and other oral health topics visit:

- ❑ American Dental Association website: www.ada.org or www.mouthhealthy.org
- ❑ American Academy of Periodontology website: www.perio.org
- ❑ Manual versus powered toothbrushing for oral health (Review) The Cochrane Library 2009, Issue 1 <http://www.thecochranelibrary.com>

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